Designing For Learning

All of you who have been in my training sessions or coaching practices know the increase focus I have personally developed on "student behaviors". I believe that the real challenge in teaching is identifying what students need to do or experience that will create the learning outcomes we want. "Teaching my content" is very different from "designing the experiences, motivation and environment" that will lead to student achievement and success.

I found a great list to consider when planning for learning in **7 Essential Principles of Innovative Learning** by Katrina Schwartz (Feb 1, 2013).

Pulling from the work of researchers at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the **Innovative Learning Environments** project, Schwartz's blog lists these principles:

*1. **Learners have to be at the center of what happens in the classroom-**They have to actively engage in learning in order to become self-regulated learners who are able to control their emotions and motivations during the study process, set goals, and monitor their own learning process.*

*2. **Learning is a social practice** and can't happen alone. Structured, collaborative group work can be good for all learners; it pushes people in different ways.*

*3. **Emotions are an integral part of learning**. If a student is upset about something that happened at home or in school, he won't learn well. Similarly, keeping students motivated should be the starting point of learning. If students understand why it matters, learning becomes more important to them.*

*4.**Learners are different and innovative learning environments reflect the various experiences and prior knowledge that each student brings to class**. This principle is understood by every frustrated educator teaching to a "middle" that doesn't exist.*

*5. **Students need to be stretched, but not too much**.*

Educators should try to prevent both coasting and overloading. Students need to experience both academic success and the challenge of discovery.

*6. **Assessment should be for learning, not of learning**. Assessments are important, but only to gauge how to structure the next lesson for maximum effectiveness.*

*7. **Learning needs to be connected across disciplines and reach out into the real world**. Understanding the connections between subjects and ideas is essential for the ability to transfer skills and adapt.*

As I read through the list I realized the interconnectedness of the items. That seems good news for designing for learning. As a teacher focuses on building one of the principles into the learning environment several of the connected ones should emerge. That can cause a coach's conversation around one principle to have an extended impact on teaching and learning. Here are some questions that coaches might add to pre conferences or to PLC planning sessions to focus teachers on these principles;

- On a scale of 1-10, how difficult will this learning goal be for the majority of your students? Where will individuals outside the majority fall?
- How much should students struggle during this class? How will you decide how to respond to the struggle?
- How much of what the teacher will do in this lesson is pre-planned versus decided as the lesson unfolds?
- Which students do you feel will be highly, moderately, or limitedly motivated in this learning activity?
- What do you want to hear in the conversations among student during the learning time?
- If you could listen into students' internal dialogues (self-talk) during the various parts of the lesson, what would you hope to hear? When?
- What do you want to learn about your students during the activity?